

**The Yale Divinity School Bible Study
New Canaan, Connecticut
Fall, 2007**

The Gospel of John

I. Prologue

Introduction:

Like the “hypothesis” that introduces an ancient Greek drama, the Prologue to the Gospel introduces important themes that run through the Gospel. The opposition of light and darkness sets the stage for the dramatic confrontations that drive the plot. The promise of new birth, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man” holds out a hope of new life. The reference to God’s creative word offers a cosmic framework for understanding the significance of Jesus and provides the readers information that the characters in the text do not share, a situation that is ripe with dramatic irony. What many view as the central affirmation of the Prologue, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” (v. 14) provides a model of “incarnation” that shaped much of the Christian theological tradition that struggled to understand the relationship of Jesus to God. The conclusion of the prologue articulates nicely what it is that the evangelist thinks that Jesus does: he “explains” who God is. He is the “Revealer” par excellence.

Much of the prologue is in quasi-poetic form, with clauses in balanced parallelism, interconnected in a climactic fashion by key words that build in climactic fashion. Between sections so structured there are elements that have a more prosaic quality. These contain references to John the Baptist, who will dominate the first scene of the Gospel as the first witness to Jesus and the Spirit that dwells in him.

Questions for Reading:

In the reference to “In the beginning” is there a recollection of Genesis? Are there other such recollections in the Prologue?

What do the metaphors of “light” and “life” evoke?

Would you characterize the Prologue as “poetic”? If so why?

Is there a climactic moment in the Prologue? If so where?

What does the expression “grace upon grace” in v 17 convey?

Questions for Reflection:

What does the image of the divine “Word” convey?

What kinds of distinctions are being drawn in the reference to different kinds of “birth”?

How does the Prologue function in connection with the narrative that follows?

Does it introduce themes that run through the text? If so, where are they found. Are there elements of the Prologue that do not appear later in the text?

Some interpreters have argued that the Prologue presents Jesus as a “revealer” who explains who God is. How do we understand “revelation”?

What is the key affirmation about Christ in the Prologue?

For further study:

Basic:

Peder Borgen, "Logos was the True Light': Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of John," *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972) 115-130, repr. in David E. Orton, *The Composition of John's Gospel: Selected Studies from Novum Testamentum* (Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 1999) 107-22.

John Ashton, "The Transformation of Wisdom: A Study of John's Prologue," *NTS* 32 (1986) 161-86.

More challenging:

Thomas Tobin, "The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990) 252-69.

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